

## **Wellbeing for Healthcare workers during this Coronavirus Pandemic:**

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has upended clinicians' sense of order and control. Such disruption may lead to substantial stress in the short term and higher risk for burnout over the long term. Worldwide, health care workers (HCWs), the front-line defense force against COVID-19, have been infected with and died from this disease. The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique long-term stressors and risks to clinicians' physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Leaders and front-line clinicians need to proactively protect the well-being of themselves and their colleagues to avoid adverse outcomes for clinicians and adverse effects on the quality of patient care. But, there are many unanswered questions related to protecting HCWs including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), screening, return to work, cleaning surfaces and equipment, etc. Amid the COVID-19 global outbreak, it's likely to be a very stressful time for those who work on the front lines of health care. Now more than ever, it's important for health systems and health care organizations to create and ensure an infrastructure and resources to support physicians, nurses, and care team members. We provide practical suggestions to encourage a culture that will sustain the clinician workforce during the pandemic. First and foremost, organizational leaders should provide clear messages that clinicians are valued and that managing the pandemic together is the goal.

Some Helpful free resources for health care professionals during this crisis: Headspace, a stress relief website, and app, is offering free access for healthcare providers through 2020. Redeem your subscription using your National Provider Identifier (NPI) and email address at: <https://www.headspace.com/health-covid-19>

[Ten Percent Happier's Coronavirus Sanity Guide](#)- practical ways of coping with stress, fear, and anxiety. FREE meditations, podcasts, blog posts, and talks for some calm amidst the chaos.

Good webinars:

<https://www.acponline.org/practice-resources/physician-well-being-and-professional-fulfillment/positive-psychology-in-times-of-crisis>  
<https://www.acponline.org/meetings-courses/acp-courses-recordings/acp-leadership-academy/acp-leadership-academy-webinars/covid-19-practical-advice-and-support-from-internists-on-the-front-lines>

Meditation:

<https://youtu.be/nZg4HelmwmE>

<https://youtu.be/OoM57Z8dRUY>

<https://youtu.be/7wFX9Wn70eM>

Good Meditation App resources:

<https://div38healthpsychologist.com/2017/10/25/peer-recommended-resources-relaxation-and-meditation-apps/>

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center posts free [guided meditations on their website](#). They also produce [UCLA Mindful](#), a freely downloadable app with meditations of various lengths. Supports include beginner instructions, guided meditations for health challenges, informative videos, and weekly podcasts.

Great overall Resource Library:

[Resources to support the health and well-being of clinicians during the COVID-19 outbreak](#) from the National Academy of Medicine

Free smartphone apps that promote mental well-being:

- Mindfulness Coach - Nice app
- Virtual HopeBox -
- CBT-I Coach
- My3

Other resources:

The Intensive Care Society (a multi-professional critical care membership organization in the UK) has produced a set of [one page printable infographics focused on reminding healthcare workers to monitor their well-being](#). Posters include "Self Care During COVID 19" and "Advice for sustaining staff well-being in critical care during COVID19". Consider printing these and placing them in your clinical areas or emailing them to your staff.

The Society for Health Psychology, a division of the American Psychological Association, hosts [peer-recommended resources for relaxation and meditation](#).

Suggestions include a sleep app and resources to address trauma

SAMHSA developed a [Fact Sheet](#) in 2014 regarding coping with stress during infectious disease outbreaks.

## **Strategies for health care leadership:**

Leaders should aim for work schedules that promote physical resilience by enabling adequate sleep and providing access to call rooms for hospital-based clinicians working long or multiple shifts. Leaders should also take initiatives to provide basic provisions during work hours, such as easy access to water, healthy snacks, chargers for phones and other devices, and toiletries. Leaders must also designate times for clinicians to take breaks, eat, and take medications. It may also be helpful to advise clinicians working such shifts to bring at least 3 days of their own medications to work and designate a source for emergency refills. Clinicians should also continue using wellness activities that have worked for them in the past and make efforts to support each other during this challenging time. The reduction of noncritical work activities may help to promote mental well-being. Examples include rescheduling preventive and routine patient follow-up visits and eliminating nonessential administrative tasks. Anxiety can be reduced by providing a central source for updated information and clear communication of well-defined protocols, expectations, and such resources as childcare via e-mails, tweets, and automated calls. When an individual clinician feels well but cannot be present in the clinical setting because of mandatory isolation or childcare, hospitals and practices should aim to redistribute work and have these clinicians participate in computer- and phone-based care while home. During the pandemic, clinicians should be encouraged to openly discuss vulnerability and the importance of protecting one's emotional strength. Health care organizations can provide information on managing stress, reducing burnout, and identifying mental health professionals available to support clinicians. Deploy designated wellness champions in health care systems and practices to field clinicians' concerns, advocate for clinicians, and distribute messages of gratitude and support. We also suggest fostering spiritual resilience through the distribution of positive messaging that emphasizes appreciation for clinicians' dedication and altruism. Disseminating strategies for connecting with colleagues to share stories of success, rather than focusing on failures and stresses, can help clinicians find joy amidst chaos. Helping clinicians recognize what they can and cannot control helps to balance expectations with realities. Surveys to assess stress points, fears, and concerns can inform leaders and provide insight into areas requiring attention.

- Value clinicians: Provide clear messages that clinicians are valued. I strongly believe this is very important.

- Communicate best practices: Communicate best practices clearly and compassionately.
- Manage expectations - create work schedules that promote resilience, ensure appropriate working hours with breaks,
- emphasize the importance of self-care,
- Monitor and promote clinician well-being: Monitor the well-being of your clinicians proactively; identify mental health professionals and counseling options available to support them. Provide appropriate measures for personal safety, and address concerns related to clinicians' safety and the safety of their families.
- Provide a supportive and blame-free work culture: Implement a psychologically safe environment for clinicians to openly discuss vulnerability, stress, burnout, and other barriers to their well-being.
- Enable cooperation and collaboration: Institute mechanisms for cooperation and collaboration between management, clinical teams, and clinicians.
- Provide a central access point for updated information, technical updates, and tools to address COVID-19: Familiarize personnel with technical updates on COVID-19 and provide appropriate tools to assess, triage, test, and treat patients and to share infection prevention and control information with patients and the public.
- Ensure clinicians are not required to return to work during dire situations: Clinicians should not be required to return to a work situation where there is continuing or serious danger to life or health until the employer has taken any necessary remedial action.
- Provide appropriate resources if clinicians are infected with COVID-19: Honor the right to compensation, rehabilitation, and curative services if clinicians are infected with COVID-19 following exposure in the workplace.
- provide sufficient resources (masks, gloves, goggles, gowns, hand sanitizer, soap and water, cleaning supplies, healthy snacks, easy access to water, chargers for phones, etc.), and provide effective personal protective equipment.
- Encourage clinicians to report incidents, such as exposures to blood or bodily fluids from the respiratory system or to cases of violence, and to adopt measures for immediate follow-up, including support to victims.

### **Strategies for Clinicians:**

- Meet basic needs: Eat, drink, sleep, and exercise regularly. Becoming biologically deprived is risky and may compromise your ability to care for patients.
- Honor your service: Remind yourself and others of the important and noble work you are doing. Recognize colleagues for their service whenever possible.
- Take breaks: Whenever possible, give yourself a rest from patient care with comforting, fun, or relaxing activities. Take walks, listen to music, read a book, write in a journal, practice breathing, and relaxation techniques, or talk with friends. Taking appropriate rest leads to proper care of patients after your break.
- Stay connected: Give and receive support from your colleagues to avoid isolation, fear, and anxiety. Partner with colleagues to support each other and monitor each other's stress, workload, and safety. Communicate with colleagues clearly and optimistically. Contact family and loved ones for support.
- Respect differences: Recognize and respect differences in yourself, your patients, and your colleagues, such as needing to talk versus needing to be alone.
- Stay updated: Rely on trusted sources of information and participate in meetings where relevant information is provided. However, avoid watching or listening to news reports 24/7. Graphic imagery and worrisome messages can increase your stress and may reduce your effectiveness and overall well-being.
- Perform self check-ins: Monitor yourself overtime for any symptoms of depression or stress, such as prolonged sadness, difficulty sleeping, intrusive memories, and/or hopelessness. Talk to a peer or supervisor, advise management so that they can provide support interventions, or seek professional help.

1. National academy of medicine website
2. Annals of internal medicine website
3. American medical association website
4. American college of physicians website

The Administration and Congress must exhaust every option available to increase PPE production and prioritize distribution to those on the frontline of combating COVID-19 outbreaks.

We must urge Congress to take action now to fill these gaps with every resource we have available, including from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). We can't afford for health care providers and first responders on the frontline to get sick because of shortages.

Emphasizing clinician wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic is necessary to enable them to provide high-quality care. We propose some preliminary, common-sense steps toward this goal and encourage colleagues to share strategies they find successful. How we meet the wellness needs of our clinicians may determine how well we survive the COVID-19 pandemic and future public health crises.